

A photograph of ancient stone ruins, including columns and steps, situated on a tiled terrace overlooking the ocean under a cloudy sky. The scene is bathed in bright sunlight, casting long shadows.

Light

...on a new world

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*Editor: Colin Dryland
Correspondence Secretary: John Carpenter*

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Cover: Roman ruins at Caesarea in Israel (see page 11)

*Note: All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV)
except where another version is indicated after the text.*

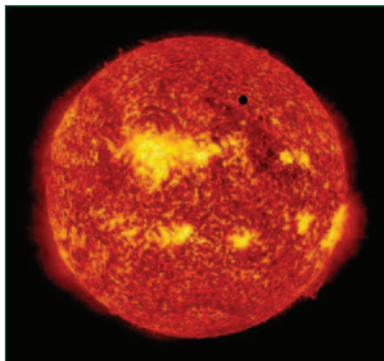
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Editorial

AN event occurred in June this year which will not happen again in the lifetime of the vast majority of the world's inhabitants. The planet Venus was observed as a small dark disc moving across the face of the Sun. Such events come in pairs, eight years apart. The previous occurrence was in June 2004 and the next will be in December 2117.



The precision with which the stars and planets move in the universe enables scientists to predict the timing and frequency of events like this, including eclipses of the sun and moon and the appearance of comets. This speaks to us of design and order on a huge scale.

The sun is just one of billions of stars in the universe. In our own galaxy, called 'The Milky Way', there are estimated to be 200-400 billion stars. Each one is a separate island in space, perhaps with planets orbiting round it. Then imagine the universe with billions of galaxies, each having as many or more stars than 'The Milky Way'. The closest star to our sun is 'Proxima Centauri' which is four light years away. A ride on the fastest ever spaceship launched from earth would take more than 70,000 years to get there.

Colours of the stars range from red to white then blue, red being the coolest colour. Our sun is an average yellowish white, around 6,000 Kelvin (a system of measuring temperatures). The hottest stars are blue with surface temperatures above 12,000 Kelvin. Mass defines the temperature of a star – the larger the core, the more nuclear fusion. This nuclear fusion creates a tremendous amount of energy, which constantly conflicts with the gravity of the mass. Many stars come in pairs called binary stars which orbit a

common centre of gravity.

Stars are first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis chapter one. Here is a simple statement that reminds us of the greatness of God who designed and created the whole universe: *'Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'* (Genesis 1.16, 17). The Bible frequently refers to the great numbers of stars in the heavens. God promised Abraham concerning his descendants: *'...I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven...'* (Genesis 22.17).

All stars look alike to the naked eye. Even when seen through a telescope, they seem to be just points of light, although analysis of their light spectra reveals that each star is different from all others. The Bible tells us that each star is unique: *'There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory'* (1 Corinthians 15.41). Some of the stars have been given names but the Psalmist tells us that every star has a God-given name *'He counts the number of the stars; he calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; his understanding is infinite'* (Psalm 147. 4, 5).

This great power of God is acknowledged by David in the Psalms:

'O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth, you who set your glory above the heavens! ... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him?' (Psalm 8. 1, 3, 4)

The answer to David's question will be appreciated when we study the Bible. Each time we look up at the stars, we will be prompted to remember our Creator and more importantly to learn what God requires of us. The prophet Daniel looked forward to a time when *'Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever'* (Daniel 12.3).

Will you be among them?



The race for life – the prize

IN the last article (see previous issue) we focussed on the need for training if we are to succeed in the race for life. This article looks at the end in view – the prize that will be awarded to those who complete the course!

The supreme occasion in the life of all entrants in Olympic competition is the moment when they receive the prize, the reward for their endeavours! All those hours of dedicated training, all that concentration of body and will are channelled towards gaining the first prize. This will demonstrate to those who witness the competition, the superiority of one's ability over all others.



The plaudits of the crowd and the congratulations of other competitors intoxicate the winner and when the final triumph is reached – that top place on the winners' podium, the emotion of the moment often causes the victor to break down as he or she receives the reward for success – the gold medal, which is then ceremonially hung on a ribbon around the neck. It is the pinnacle of athletic achievement – sought by many but accomplished by few.

Men and women all over the world have been training for these current Olympic Games, spending many hours of dedicated preparation in the hope that they will be the ones to beat all others and secure the gold medal, that prestigious reward for their efforts. Competitive public games have been held for thousands of years.

In the writings of the apostles there are a number of oblique references to these events which were followed avidly by many people of the times, especially the Greeks in whose lands at least four different competitive games were held at regular intervals. These were the Pythian or Delphic Games, the Isthmian or Corinthian Games, the Nemean Games and lastly the Olympic Games. The winners of the particular events were rewarded with a woven crown of laurel leaves, or sometimes pine, olive or parsley, which was placed upon the head of the victor and provided immediate recognition of their achievements to all the spectators.

The Corinthian Games

There was one problem with a crown, or wreath, made out of leaves. It soon withered and died, especially in the hot climate of Mediterranean lands. It was this very point which the Apostle Paul made in his letter to the believers at Corinth. Using the Corinthian Games as a basis for exhortation, he wrote:

‘...Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last’ (I Corinthians 9.24, 25 NIV).

There was no way in which the laurel or olive wreath could maintain its original fresh and bright appearance, for according to the laws of nature, in due time it had to wither, lose its colour and eventually crumble away completely.



But it was here that the apostle drew a comparison. He was writing to believers of the true Gospel message and he continued: ‘...*but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever*’ (I Corinthians 9.25 NIV).

The prize which awaited true believers was something altogether better than the prize for which the athletes of his day strove so arduously! However, in the same way as they trained rigorously for their races to win a prize which soon would fade away, the Apostle Paul strongly encouraged those early

Christians to put all their energies into the race which they had entered, the race for which the prize would be a special reward from God. It was an extremely important race for him and in the following words to the believers at Corinth, Paul encouraged them by his own example:

‘Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize’ (I Corinthians 9.26, 27 NIV).

We notice from these words that the Apostle Paul had a goal clearly in his mind – something for which he was prepared to expend every ounce of energy to achieve – keeping all his bodily weaknesses in submission to ensure that he would be given the prize at the end of his race. This was a prize quite different from those awarded to winners at the Games, for his prize would last **for ever!**



Winning the race

The Christian prize

What then was the prize for which he was willing to spend his whole life? What was the prize which he encouraged the Christian believers at Corinth to run for with equal determination? What is the prize which the Bible promises to all who are faithful to the commandments of God?

It is none other than **everlasting life!**

This is the message of hope to all true Christians, the message for all who apply themselves diligently to following God’s commandments – who are in

effect, in continual training for the special reward which God holds out to all who remain faithful to His Word. In another letter the Apostle Paul wrote about the coming day of judgement in these words:

‘... the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God “will give to each person according to what he has done”. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.’

(Romans 2.5-7 NIV)

The word ‘*persistence*’ used here by Paul makes a good parallel with all who train for the Olympic Games. It is only by persistence or perseverance, that they will have any chance of attaining that first place. Similarly, it is only by persistence that men and women will be given the prize of immortality by God. In the race for eternal life not everyone will receive the prize, in just the same way as people who drop out of any athletic competition have no hope of gaining a medal. The apostle continues in his letter to the Romans:

‘But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger’ (Romans 2.8 NIV).

The difference is clearly discernable. On one hand there are those who seek after good, who seek for glory and honour – these will be given the prize. On the other hand those who seek self-indulgence and who reject the truth of Bible teaching, will be disqualified and will receive only the wrath and anger of God.

The conditions for success

In the sixth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans he describes requirements which are necessary for all who enter the race for life eternal. These are belief, and then baptism. After baptism the believer is to concentrate all energies on the race ahead, because the past, with all its sins, has been washed away. Paul wrote:

‘But now having been set free from sin (after baptism), and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life’ (Romans 6.22).

This prize, for which all true Christians seek, is mentioned time and again as a reward for the righteous. But its bestowal is not the automatic right of all who claim to be Christians. It is a prize to be striven for and will only be given after a lifetime of genuine effort to please God and obey His commandments. When the Apostle Paul wrote to his dear friend the young man Timothy, he spelled this out quite clearly and the message is just as powerful today for all who come to an understanding of the true Gospel message. Paul wrote to Timothy:

‘But you, O man of God ... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life ...’ (1Timothy 6. 11, 12).

Those words underline the effort which is involved in pleasing God and being certain of the prize. The young Timothy was a protégé of the Apostle Paul, but even he needed to be exhorted to strenuous actions in order to achieve the reward.

There are numerous other references in the Scriptures to this promised reward from God. The Lord Jesus preached everlasting life as the reward for righteousness and the Apostles Peter and John also made frequent references to the same reward. It was Peter who made a comparison between the fading crown of laurel bestowed upon competitors for their athletic prowess, and the everlasting nature of God’s prize for the faithful. He wrote about ‘*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away*’ (1 Peter 1.4). Again in the same letter he wrote that ‘*when the Chief Shepherd (Jesus) appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away*’ (1 Peter 5.4).

The kingdom of God

The words ‘everlasting life’, ‘eternal life’ and ‘immortality’ are used many times in the Bible as the prize to be awarded to faithful believers, but where is that unending period of blessedness to be enjoyed? The Bible tells us that it is to be enjoyed in the kingdom of God – a time of blessedness and peace which is to be brought about on earth when Jesus returns. He is to be king of that kingdom and all nations of the earth will eventually become subject to his rule.

When Jesus was engaged in his ministry in Judaea, most of his time was spent in preaching about this coming kingdom. He performed many miracles of healing and on some occasions he brought those who were dead back to life. However, most of his time was spent in preaching about this coming kingdom and showing how men and women must make themselves ready for that day. We read in the Gospel of Luke:

‘Now it came to pass, afterwards, that he went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him’ (Luke 8.1).

Later on those disciples, who had accompanied him throughout his ministry, asked him what their reward would be. His answer was that they would be able to share that coming kingdom with him:

‘But you are those who have continued with me in my trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one upon me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Luke 22.28-30).

Their reward was for their dedication to the things of Jesus. It was their prize for their devotion to God and the hardships which they had suffered for their Lord.

Over the centuries, many other men and women who entered the race for eternal life have also had to suffer hardships and persecution. The Apostles Barnabas and Paul warned the early believers that the way to the kingdom of God was bound to be a difficult one to follow. In the Acts we read about these two apostles:

‘...they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”’ (Acts 14.21, 22).

The ‘*tribulations*’ which were suffered by those 1st Century believers were their struggles for the prize, for, just as in the Olympic Games, the ultimate goal is not achieved without considerable personal effort.

In comparison, the race which believers have entered now, for the most part is not accompanied by the persecutions which the early Christians suffered. Persecution for the sake of Jesus is now comparatively rare although in the past men and women have been tortured and put to death for the faith which they held. The prize however, is still the same – everlasting life in the kingdom of God on earth. In the book of Revelation our minds are projected into the future when the redeemed – those who gained the prize, will sing a new song:

‘...you (Jesus) were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth’ (Revelation 5.9, 10).

The earth in that day will not be the polluted world in which we live today with all its attendant problems of war, starvation, sickness and disease. God’s prize for the faithful followers of Jesus will not be to sentence them to everlasting life on a dying planet! Rather, when Jesus returns, the Bible tells us there will be ‘*times of refreshing*’ (Acts 3.19), a time of cleansing and re-vitalisation, to make the earth a fit habitation for Jesus and those who will gain the promised reward. It will become a place of beauty and contentment and those who live there will dwell in perpetual happiness and peace (see article entitled ‘The reality of Christ’s kingdom’ on page 27).

There are many passages in the Scriptures which describe this happy time which we believe is to happen soon, when Jesus returns to set up God’s kingdom on earth. Our wisdom is to ensure that we will be among those who will receive the prize in that coming day:

‘...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...’ (Hebrews 12.1, 2 NIV)

That is the compelling counsel of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrew believers and it is just as compelling to us today as it was to them. The prize is waiting to be claimed – not by one, but by all who come to a full understanding of God and the Lord Jesus through the pages of the Bible.

But the time is short – **enter the race for life eternal today, while there is still time!**

CHRISTADELPHIAN BELIEFS

- ❖ There is only one God the Creator
- ❖ Jesus Christ is the Son of God
- ❖ The Holy Spirit is the power of God
- ❖ The Bible is the inspired word of God
- ❖ Man is mortal and dies because of sin
- ❖ Resurrection is the true hope of believers
- ❖ Salvation is only possible through Jesus
- ❖ Belief and baptism are essential for salvation
- ❖ There is only one Gospel
- ❖ The Gospel was preached to Abraham
- ❖ The Jews are God's witnesses
- ❖ The kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of God on earth
- ❖ Jesus will return to re-establish the kingdom of God on earth
- ❖ Jesus will be king over the kingdom of God
- ❖ The reward of the righteous will be eternal life on earth



The Development of the 1st Century Church

7. Peter & Cornelius

AFTER the conversion of Saul, who was later to become Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, the book of Acts records the conversion of a Roman Centurion called Cornelius. This event must be regarded as confirmation of the fact that Gentiles were to be admitted into the fellowship of the 1st Century believers. They too could now share the hope of everlasting life that was made possible through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Although Jesus had told them to *‘make disciples of all the nations’* (Matthew 28.19), the apostles were slow to undertake that phase of their work. This was due to the fact that they were Jews and, in accordance with the traditions to which they had been accustomed all their lives, Gentiles were regarded by Jews as outside the scope of God’s plan of salvation, unless they became related to it by becoming Jewish proselytes. A proselyte is someone who converts from one religion to another. One such person was the Ethiopian eunuch who had come to Jerusalem to worship and was subsequently baptized by Philip (see Acts chapter 8 and the article in Light volume 23.1).

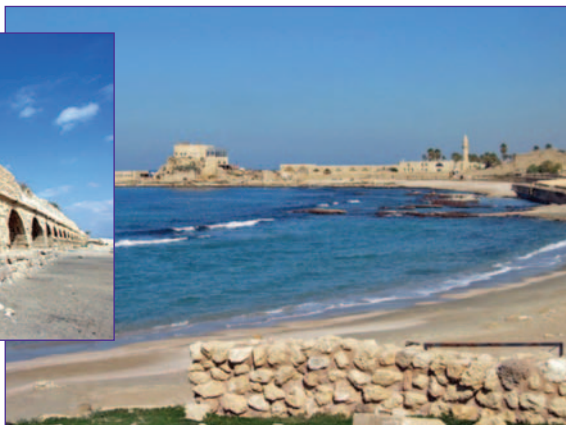
The Gospel preached to the Gentiles

The record of the preaching of the gospel to Gentile believers opens in the city of Caesarea, a fitting place for this important event. Caesarea (sometimes called Caesarea Maritima meaning ‘Caesarea by the sea’) was the headquarters of the Roman government in Palestine, the capital of the province and the seat of the Procurator, who only visited Jerusalem when circumstances made such a visit desirable. Caesarea was a much more acceptable place for a Roman to establish his home. It had been built by

Herod the Great in honour of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. It had a harbour; there was a theatre and an amphitheatre, temples and statues dedicated to Rome and to the Emperor. The Jews regarded it with suspicion, and its population was mostly made up of Samaritans and other Gentiles.



Ruins of Caesarea



A Roman garrison was stationed there composed mostly of auxiliary troops, drawn and recruited from Syria, though it was known as the Italian cohort.



One of the officers of the garrison was a centurion called Cornelius, a distinctly Roman name. Luke tells us that he was *'a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people (that is to the Jews), and prayed to God always'* (Acts 10.2).

As a centurion, he had charge of a 'century', originally one hundred men, although the term had become a title rather than an indication of the size of the section over which a centurion had command. His position may be compared, roughly, with that of a senior non-commissioned officer in the British army.

He was not a proselyte to the Jewish religion, but was of the class frequently referred to in the Acts of the Apostles as ‘God-fearers’. People so described accepted the Jewish doctrine of one God, but did not conform to the various ordinances of the Jewish law including the rite of circumcision.

Clean and unclean meats

It is reasonable to think that one of the things which Cornelius prayed for was guidance in his religious thoughts. His prayer was answered by a vision which came to him about three o’clock one afternoon. In his vision he saw an angel who told him to send to Joppa and fetch Peter to him. Without delay, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of his company who waited on him, told them what he had heard and seen, and instructed them to go to Joppa (now called Jaffa and part of the modern city of Tel-Aviv) and bring Peter to Caesarea. Cornelius, in acting so promptly, demonstrated the reality of his religious motives. By the next day the men sent by Cornelius were at the house of Simon in Joppa, some forty miles away, where Peter was lodging (Acts 10.3-8).



Painting of market at Jaffa (biblical Joppa) by Gustav Bauernfiend 1877

Then the scene shifts to Joppa, where on the day following Cornelius’ vision, Peter, still influenced by his Jewish prejudices, had gone on to the flat roof of Simon’s house to pray. He became hungry and this no doubt influenced his response to the vision which came to him while in a trance. In his dream Peter saw a great sheet, knit at the four corners, let down from

heaven. When it reached him he saw that it was full of animals, creeping things and birds – both clean and unclean to the Jews. At the same time, he heard a voice say *'Rise, Peter; kill and eat'* (Acts 10.13).

Peter's response was characteristic of him; although he was hungry he said: *'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean'* (Acts 10.14), to which a further reply came: *'What God has cleansed you must not call common'* (Acts 10.15). The same vision was repeated three times. The distinction between clean and unclean meats was not a matter of Jewish tradition; it was included in the Law of Moses (see Leviticus chapter 11).

While Peter was perplexed about the vision, the three men sent by Cornelius arrived outside Simon's house and asked for him. The Holy Spirit informed him that they were there and had been sent by God, and that he was to *'go with them, doubting nothing'* (Acts 10.20). Peter went down, told the men that he was the man whom they were enquiring after and asked why they had come. They told him of the vision Cornelius had seen; that he was a centurion, a righteous man who feared God and that he had sent for Peter to hear words from him. Impressed by his vision, and the fact that the men had been sent as the result of what had been said to Cornelius, Peter received them into the house and lodged them there.

Contrary to Jewish Custom

Next day they took their journey northwards back to Caesarea. Realising that important events might take place on a visit directly arranged by God, Peter took six Jewish Christians with him to be witnesses of what happened. All through the journey he must have wondered what his and Cornelius' visions meant.

Meanwhile Cornelius, also recognizing the importance of what was happening, gathered his relatives and friends to hear the words he was to receive from Peter. When Peter entered the house, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshipped him. Peter protested strongly saying: *'Stand up; I myself am also a man'* (Acts 10.26).

Peter reminded those who were assembled that it was contrary to Jewish customs for him to associate with, or even enter the house of one of another nation. However, the Law of Moses contained no such prohibition; it was one of the traditions that had been added by the Jewish religious leaders.

Peter told them that God had showed him that he was not to call any person common or unclean and asked why he had been sent for. Cornelius recounted his vision and added: *'Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God'* (Acts 10.33).

Peter's address

Peter's address was the first apostolic address ever given to non-Jews or proselytes. It commenced with the statement that *'God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears him (God) and works righteousness is accepted by him'* (Acts 10.34, 35). Peter went on to speak about Jesus Christ, whom he described as *'Lord of all'*. Cornelius and those with him knew of Jesus, for sayings concerning him had been published throughout all Judea. Peter briefly recounted the public life of Jesus, who had been anointed with the Holy Spirit; how he went about doing good, as Peter and his fellow apostles had witnessed.

Then Peter reached the high point of his address. Jesus had been crucified but God had raised him from the dead. However incredulous a Roman might be of such a story, Cornelius had been prepared for it by rumours he must have heard, and by the vision which he had seen. Furthermore, Peter declared this same Jesus was to be *'Judge of the living and the dead'* (Acts 10.42). He also underlined the importance of the Old Testament prophets of Israel, who had borne witness to him, that through his name every one that believed in him should *'receive remission of sins'* (Acts 10.43). It was a carefully worded address.

A totally unexpected event then occurred – the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius and those who were with him. The Christians whom Peter had taken with him were amazed – Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles and others had received it on the Day of Pentecost, and they gave evidence of the fact in the same way, speaking with tongues and magnifying God. To Peter the evidence that God was at work was clear and he asked:

“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord’ (Acts 10.47, 48).

It was a great day in the experience of the Church; its importance is recognized in the space that is given to it in the book of Acts. Gentiles as

well as Jews could now participate in the benefits of the gospel message; they could become fellow-heirs of great promises, together with the natural descendants of Abraham the friend of God.

Naturally, there was more to be said on the main theme and Cornelius and his friends asked Peter to stay with them for several days. Those days would no doubt be spent in brotherly conversation between Jews and Gentiles who were joined together in fellowship through belief and baptism into the saving name of Jesus. It is probable that Philip took part in this; he was last heard of in Caesarea (see Acts 8.40) and was found living there by Paul and his companions at a later stage in the development of the 1st Century Church (Acts 21.8).

Important principles

We can identify a number of all-important principles in Peter's address in the house of Cornelius, which we might call Peter's gospel to the Gentiles:

- ❖ **The importance of the Old Testament** in preparation for the coming of Christ. *'The word which God sent to the children of Israel'* (Acts 10.36) i.e. the Old Testament prophets.
- ❖ **The ministry of Jesus:**
 - a) miracles of healing: *'who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil'* (Acts 10.38).
 - b) ***'for God was with him'*** (Acts 10.38). This is the meaning of the name Immanuel which Isaiah had foretold would be one of the names of Jesus: *'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel'* (Isaiah 7.14).
- ❖ **The death and resurrection of Jesus**
 - a) his crucifixion: *'whom they killed by hanging on a tree'* (Acts 10.39).
 - b) his resurrection: *'Him God raised up on the third day'* (Acts 10.40).
 - c) his fellowship with the disciples after his resurrection: *'... and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen*

DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH (7)

before by God, even to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead’ (Acts 10.40,41).

- ❖ **The preaching of the Gospel:** *‘And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead’ (Acts 10.42).*
- ❖ **Remission (forgiveness) of sins through faith in Jesus:** *‘whoever believes in him will receive remission of sins’ (Acts 10.43).* There is no other route to forgiveness, and consequently no other way to the kingdom of God.
- ❖ **No partiality or respect of persons:**
 - a) *‘he (Jesus Christ) is Lord of all’ (Acts 10.36)*
 - b) men and women are called to the service of Christ out of all nations: *‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him’ (Acts 10.34, 35).*
- ❖ **Christ is to be Judge of both living and dead** – therefore there must be a resurrection from the dead (Acts 10.42).
- ❖ **Baptism in water is essential:** *“‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord’ (Acts 10.47).* **Note that even though they now had the Holy Spirit they were not exempt from baptism in water. This principle is of the utmost importance.**

A challenge by Jewish Christians

Peter had acted wisely in taking a number of Jewish Christians with him to see Cornelius. News spread quickly and when he returned to Jerusalem his action was challenged by the Jewish believers in the city, described as *‘the apostles and brethren’ (Acts 11.1).*

They took a serious view of the matter for we read that *‘when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, “You*

went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”” (Acts 11.2, 3). Apparently it was not the baptism they objected to, but the fact that Peter had eaten with Gentiles (*‘uncircumcised men’*).

In reply, Peter related the whole sequence of events, including his own and Cornelius’ visions. He told of the giving of the Holy Spirit, and appealed to the men who had accompanied him. In connection with the giving of the Holy Spirit he said: *‘Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit”’* (Acts 11.16). He finished with the question: *‘If therefore God gave them the same gift as he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’* (Acts 11.17). There was nothing more to be said. The dispute was over and what a great change came over the assembled believers:

‘When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life”’ (Acts 11.18).

Lessons for today

Peter had to learn that salvation was not limited to Jews. God’s acceptance of the Gentiles was openly confirmed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. His Jewish brethren had to learn the same lesson. Cornelius had to learn that even though he was a God-fearing and prayerful man his knowledge and appreciation of the Gospel was still deficient and more importantly he still needed to be baptized into Christ.

We too can learn lessons from this incident. No matter how full of good works we are, this is not a substitute for a correct understanding of the Gospel and baptism into Christ. The teaching of mainstream Christianity is out of step with this essential requirement for the salvation of believers. It is no good thinking that God ought to be pleased with whatever we think should be acceptable to Him. We cannot decide, let alone dictate the way to the kingdom of God for ourselves.

The teaching of Jesus provides a warning for all who desire to be associated with him in his kingdom. Towards the end of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ Jesus summed up his teaching in a powerful message to his disciples:

‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?”’ (Matthew 7.21,22 NIV).

We can imagine their stunned surprise, on hearing the answer to their question from Jesus, the righteous judge:

‘Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”’ (Matthew 7.23 NIV).

We urge you to be like Cornelius, to examine your own beliefs and way of life in the light of God’s Word, and consider what changes are necessary if you desire to be accepted by Jesus when he returns to set up God’s kingdom.

Clifford Wharton
Surrey, UK

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From our Mail Bag

A reader has asked what Jesus meant by saying that *'the kingdom of God is within you'*.

These words were spoken by Jesus in answer to a question posed by the Pharisees. Luke records that *'when he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you"'* (Luke 17.20, 21).

The problem is that people have interpreted the teaching of Jesus as indicating that the kingdom will not come when Jesus returns to the earth but that the kingdom is spiritual in nature and dwells within believers now. The following definition can be found on a Catholic website:

'Because there is no limit to the presence of God, the Kingdom of God has no boundaries. The Kingdom may exist in the individual human heart, in groups, in institutions, in nature and in the cosmos as a whole. The Kingdom of God is as broad and as overarching as the presence of God which renews and transforms and recreates everything touched by it' (www.americancatholic.org).

Is this definition of the kingdom of God correct?

The first thing to recognise is that the comments of Jesus were directed to the Pharisees who asked a question about when the kingdom of God would come. By way of background we need to be aware of Jesus' general condemnation of the Pharisees. Their dedicated adherence to the Law of Moses is well documented in the New Testament and he referred to them as hypocrites. The words of Jesus are found in Matthew chapter 23 where we read: *'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do'* (Matthew 23.2,3). The rest of this

chapter contains specific words of condemnation for this hypocritical attitude of the Pharisees, a flavour of which is given in the following selected verses:

‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness’ (Matthew 23. 27, 28).

We see quite clearly that when addressing the Pharisees, Jesus could not on the one hand be suggesting that the kingdom of God was within them spiritually and at the same time telling them that they were unclean hypocrites and full of dead men’s bones.

The intended sense of the passage in Luke is conveyed by the Revised Standard Version of the Bible: ‘... *the kingdom of God is in the midst of you*’ (Luke 17.21 RSV). Another version has a marginal note that gives the meaning as ‘*among you*’ (Luke 17.21 NIV margin). What then was the true meaning of his words?

Jesus was there in their midst – he is the nucleus of God’s planned kingdom and is the very embodiment of the principles of the kingdom and yet the Pharisees refused to accept that he was the Jews’ promised Messiah (God’s anointed king) and more importantly that he was the Son of God. The words of the angel Gabriel confirm these two aspects in announcing his birth to his mother Mary:

‘He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’
(Luke 1.32, 33)

The kingdom of God is a literal kingdom to be established on the earth and this fact is included in the model prayer Jesus gave to his disciples: ‘*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*’ (Matthew 6. 10). It is also implied in the words of Jesus known as ‘The Beatitudes’: ‘*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*’ (Matthew 5. 5).

Because the kingdom is to be on the earth then clearly Jesus must return to establish this coming kingdom. If you search through Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians you will find a reference to this in every chapter. For example we read concerning these 1st Century believers that they '*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven*' (1 Thessalonians 1.9, 10). Again, Paul reminds them of the great hope for the future that they shared with him: '*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*' (1 Thessalonians 2.19).

There is also a sense in which Jesus as the focal point of God's promised kingdom, was using this fact as being synonymous with himself. By his very presence and by miracles, wonders, and signs, he demonstrated that he truly was the Son of God, as Peter stated in his discourse recorded in Acts chapter two. The concept that when Jesus was physically there, he represented the coming kingdom of God, can be demonstrated by the following verses:

'... heal the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" ... "Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you"' (Luke 10. 9, 11).

'But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Luke 11. 20).

To sum up, we note that while Jesus was among the people, he was demonstrating that he was to be the king of the future kingdom of God on earth and was therefore the very embodiment of the Old Testament prophecies relating to the coming Messiah. However, before he was in a position to achieve his Father's wishes he had to prove himself by living a perfect life and die as a sacrifice, to give those who truly follow him a hope for the future:

'... Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him' (Hebrews 9.28 NIV).

What did Jesus Mean?

‘You are my friends if ...’

THE little word ‘if’ makes so much difference to the meaning of the saying of Jesus which forms the title of this article. He said: ‘*You are my friends if you do whatever I command you*’ (John 15.14).

Jesus was talking to his disciples. He knew that it was only going to be a matter of hours before he was arrested by the Jewish leaders and he would have to face death at the hands of the Roman authorities. His followers would have to face the future without his physical presence and he went on to reassure them. He said: ‘... *everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*’ (John 15.15 NIV).

The things which Jesus had learned from his Father are a set of rules not only for this life – but will lead us to eternal life, because earlier Jesus had told Nicodemus: ‘...*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*’ (John 3.16). We can have that same invitation to become friends of Jesus and to share eternal life with him under the same conditions if we do whatever Jesus commands.

Through Jesus, God has offered us something far greater than anything we can hope for in this life. If we are going to accept His offer though, we have to read the instructions and abide by them. If we buy a new computer or other piece of equipment we must read the instruction manual first. We might think that a set of instructions that will show us the way to everlasting life would have to be vastly more complicated than those for a computer, but they are all contained in the Bible which not only includes the instructions but also many stories used as illustrations and examples.

Jesus’ instructions are not difficult to keep as he told his followers:

‘Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle

and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11.28-30).

If we look at these instructions that Jesus gave to his immediate followers, we will find a code of conduct and ethics that makes a lot of sense for a peaceful and successful life now. More importantly, it has the immeasurably greater advantage of qualifying us for that promise of '*everlasting life*'. Jesus expanded the point and introduced another vital concept when he instructed his followers:

'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...' (Mark 16.15,16 NIV).

In the Gospel record of Matthew we read of an occasion when Jesus was asked by an expert in the Jewish law which was the greatest commandment. His reply is just as appropriate to us now, two thousand years later, as it was then:

"... You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind". This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 22.37-40).

Here Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, one of the books of Moses, which stresses the concept of a total commitment to God based on love and respect rather than fear and dread that was and still is a feature of pagan ideas of worship. That same love and commitment will be reciprocated. If we demonstrate our love for Jesus, then he has promised us the love of God in return, in words that link with the title of this article:

'He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest (show) myself to him....If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him' (John 14.21, 23).

God has promised that if we really do love Him with that total commitment, we shall receive a tangible reward. That reward is a place in the kingdom of

God and it is in that kingdom that we shall experience the ultimate fulfilment of the promise of Jesus who also said: *'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also'* (John 14.3).

Jesus said that to love God was the most important of all the commandments, but he also said that the second command is like it: *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'* (Mark 12.31) and as the Gospel records tell us, his life was devoted to obeying these two great commandments. But the greatest example of this love for others is demonstrated in his sacrifice. He told his disciples shortly before he was arrested and crucified: *'...love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends'* (John 15.12, 13). Then Jesus spoke the words which form the basis of this article: *'You are my friends if you do whatever I command you'* (John 15.14).



The Good Samaritan

Many of the commands of Jesus were illustrated in the form of parables, stories that had a hidden meaning. Perhaps the best known of these illustrates this concept of unselfishness and service to others. Luke records the parable of the Good Samaritan and when Jesus finished making the point that we must take every available opportunity to help others, he told his hearers to *'go and do likewise'* (Luke 10.37).

In addition to the Good Samaritan, there are many more parables of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, covering almost every aspect of life. Those who want to be the friends of Jesus are told not be afraid to live by the Word of God and to show our obedience to him by our way of life. We are to be sure of our grounding in the faith by building our lives on the bedrock of the Bible. We are warned to be ready for Jesus to return at any moment, to set up the kingdom of God on earth. Before the reward promised to the friends of Jesus must come judgement (2 Corinthians 5.9, 10). We can be assured of God's mercy at the judgement if we continue to

obey his simple instruction '*You are my friends if...*'

True Christianity means following Jesus and to do this we must believe what he believed and obey his teachings. Jesus makes us an offer of being much more than just followers – we can be his friends, but in order to claim that friendship we must learn what he expects of those friends, and then follow his instructions. It is no use thinking we can be Christians without that knowledge and obedience; it is no use expecting the Christian reward without first living a Christian life. Jesus has issued the invitation and has shown us the way.

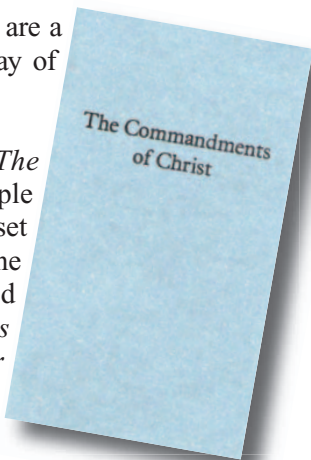
In Matthew chapter 25, Jesus told his followers a parable about sheep and goats, in which he describes the time of his return to the earth, when men and women from all nations will be brought before him for judgement and Jesus will '*separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats*' (Matthew 25.32). To those who fail to demonstrate their allegiance to their Saviour, he will say '*depart from me, you cursed*' (Matthew 25.41).

Those who are truly the friends of Jesus, will be recognised by him and found approved at his coming. They will hear these wonderful words from the lips of the one who truly is their saviour and their friend:

'Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25.34).

The kingdom of God and our places in that kingdom are a gift from God – but only **if** we show Him in our way of life that we are the friends of Jesus now.

Send for a **FREE booklet** entitled '*The Commandments of Christ*' which lists in a simple format the teaching of Jesus and his apostles as set out in the Gospels and other apostolic writings in the New Testament. As the preface of this pocket-sized booklet says: '*Before we can keep his commandments, we must know them, and in order to know them we must remember them*'.



Bible Teaching About...

The Reality of Christ's Kingdom

MILLIONS of people are familiar with 'The Lord's Prayer'; many of us learnt it as children and can recite it by heart. But do we appreciate the full significance of its words and phrases? In particular, how do we understand the familiar phrases about the kingdom of God? The words of Jesus are:

'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'

(Matthew 6.10 KJV)

What is the reality behind that simple petition of Jesus? That is the question we hope to answer in this article.

A heavenly kingdom on earth

Those words convey an incredible vision of this earth, as far removed from present realities as it is possible to get. They speak of a planet on whose surface God's will is done as perfectly as it is now done in heaven. At no time during the 2,000 years that have almost elapsed since Jesus first uttered that prayer, can that situation be said to have existed. Nor does it exist today. As we contemplate the violence, injustice, vice and crime that surround us, we seem to be further away than ever from that blessed vision for this earth.

Yet it remains a vision that Jesus has taught his disciples to pray for. Jesus is not teaching us to pray for '*pie in the sky*'; this is not a vision of heaven. Rather is it a vision of a heavenly situation here on earth; of a kingdom that will do what no other kingdom on earth has ever done before.

Since time immemorial, writers, philosophers, politicians and statesmen have dreamed of systems of perfect world government that would bathe the

globe in peace and plenty. However, their dreams have been fundamentally flawed, based as they invariably have been on the perception that man can achieve perfection, the notion that men and women can themselves reverse the self-destructive tendencies of human nature that lie at the root of so many of the problems that afflict this planet. The creeds, systems and philosophies that have dreamed of perfection on earth have therefore been doomed to remain nothing more than dreams. When all attempts have been made to put them into practice, the result has always been disaster and disillusionment.

The human element

In contrast, the Bible has no illusions about the nature of man. Take, for example, the problem of human aggression, possibly the cause of the greatest suffering on the earth. The Bible asks: *‘What causes fights and quarrels among you?’* (James 4.1 NIV).

The answer James gives lies within ourselves:

‘Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight...’ (James 4.1, 2 NIV).

That is the diagnosis. Can man himself effect a cure? The Bible is not hopeful here. Even a man of the calibre of the Apostle Paul had to admit that *‘what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing’* (Romans 7.19 NIV).

No matter how good Paul’s intentions, human sinfulness was ever present:

‘So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me’ (Romans 7.21 NIV).

If this depressing picture of human frailty was true for as worthy a man as the Apostle Paul, it bodes ill for the rest of us. Certainly it strips away any illusions that we humans may have about transforming our world with no help other than from ourselves.

However, the reality of the kingdom of God does not depend on frail man

for its achievement. It differs from all the other visions of perfection here on earth that have inspired and also disillusioned so many. For the kingdom of God is divine in origin as well as character. As ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ puts it, God’s will is to be done on earth, not as a vain hope, but as a reality – as real as the divine will now carried out by the angels of God in heaven.

‘Glory to God in the highest’

One of the Old Testament prophets of Israel describes this unprecedented state of affairs in a vivid figure:

‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea’ (Habakkuk 2.14).

In other words, the subservience to God’s will in the kingdom is to be universal and complete. Only then will those problems, which now appear so intractable, begin to be solved to the great benefit of humankind, as the host of angels sang at the birth of Jesus Christ:

‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!’ (Luke 2.14).

The most fundamental problem of all, human aggression and violence, will be solved only when God’s name is known and revered throughout the world and what is true for one problem must be true for all the others. This vision of the future implies such a revolution in human affairs that it seems almost too incredible to contemplate. What guarantee do we have that God will directly intervene in human affairs to establish His kingdom? Consider first the words of the prophet Daniel who described the time when the kingdoms of men would cease to exist:

‘...in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever’ (Daniel 2.44).

The necessary assurance is given to us in some more words of the Apostle Paul:

‘...he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained (the Lord Jesus Christ). He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead’ (Acts 17.31).

Jesus will have a pivotal role in the kingdom of God as king in the name of God. It is also a demonstrable fact of history that he was raised from the dead, itself an incredible occurrence, and so, quite naturally, the fact of the resurrection becomes a guarantee of the **reality of the kingdom of God** as promised in the pages of the Bible.

Jesus will reign

The fact that it is styled ‘The kingdom of God’ suggests that it will be a literal kingdom with a king, a capital city and all the appurtenances of government, its divine nature notwithstanding. At its head therefore, will be a king who will be none other than the one whose resurrection guarantees the future of the kingdom. For we are told that, when the kingdom of God is established:

‘...The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever!’
(Revelation 11.15)

Jesus will reign as king over God’s kingdom and as we would expect, his rule will be characterised by wisdom and justice as we are told by the prophet Isaiah who painted many word pictures of this coming kingdom:

‘Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice ... The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings...’ (Isaiah 32.1,17, 18).

Benevolent kingship as never before seen in the history of mankind will bear its fruit as we read in Psalm 72:

‘He will judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice ... he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor’ (Psalm 72.2, 4).

The extent of Christ's rule will be worldwide, quite literally so:

‘He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. . . Yes, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him ... And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed’ (Psalm 72.8, 11, 17).

Jerusalem the capital

Government, especially a perfect worldwide government, has to have a centre. In the kingdom of God, Jerusalem will perform this function as its capital city. Thus, Jesus told his disciples:

‘... do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King’ (Matthew 5:34-35).

As the seat of all power and authority, Jerusalem will be the place from which the government of the kingdom of God will emanate:

‘... For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem ... the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even for ever. And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.’ (Micah 4:2, 7, 8)

The aim of the United Nations organisation is to promote peace and harmony amongst the nations of the world but we are constantly reminded of the failure of the so-called ‘peacekeepers’ to achieve this. This sculpture outside the UN building in New York reminds us of the time when God will bring peace to this troubled world.



Let us look in detail at the benefits of this perfect world government. As we have seen, the most prominent blessing of the kingdom will be peace, a peace that will permeate the whole of human society. There will no longer be any of the preparations for war that now consume so many of the world's resources for:

‘... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ (Isaiah 2.4).

‘In his days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more’ (Psalm 72.7).

One reason for this tranquillity will be that *‘the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace’* (Palms 37.11). This tranquillity will extend even to the world of nature, for we read in Isaiah that *‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox’* (Isaiah 65.25).

A fertile earth

Another benefit of this benevolent world government will be that famine and starvation will be things of the past. The fertility of our planet will be transformed when: ‘... the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice ... For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water...’ (Isaiah 35.1, 6, 7).



The planet will become so fertile that:

‘There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth’ (Psalms 72.16).

‘...the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it’ (Amos 9.13).

The consequences of this increase in fertility will be that starvation and malnutrition, from which a large proportion of the world’s population now suffers, will be banished from the kingdom of God.

Perfect justice

The world today is full of crime and injustice but this will all change when a wholly righteous and divinely appointed king is ruling the earth. The reason for this perfect equity will be that the judge will not be using imperfect human methods, for in describing the future world ruler, Isaiah foretold:

‘The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth ...’ (Isaiah 11.2-4 NIV).

No human motivation will be allowed to warp divine justice. Perfect justice will extend even to the places where people live and work. These will no longer be areas where men and women are exploited. Again the prophet Isaiah describes these great changes that are coming:

‘They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat ... They will not toil in vain ... for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them’ (Isaiah 65:21-23 NIV).

At last, the dream of every working man and woman will be fulfilled:

‘...everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken’ (Micah 4.4).

Health and longevity

This perfection will extend to the health of those who live in the kingdom of God and in these perfect conditions life will be extended:

‘Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing ...’ (Isaiah 35.5,6).

‘Never again will there be in it (Jerusalem) an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed’ (Isaiah 65.20 NIV).

Even the problem of multiplicity of languages, which does so much now to promote disharmony and discord will then be solved. One language only will be the rule universally applied, for the prophet Zephaniah tells us:

‘For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve him with one accord’ (Zephaniah 3.9).

That, then, is the wonderful reality of the coming kingdom, soon to be established on this earth, for which Jesus taught his followers to pray. It is not an impractical dream and it has God’s guarantee – the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 17.31). Let us then respond to the urging of Jesus to put away our present mundane cares, for he said: ‘...*seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*’ (Matthew 6:33). If we truly seek it first in our lives, we will be able to share in the blessings of that coming age.

Marvellous are your works

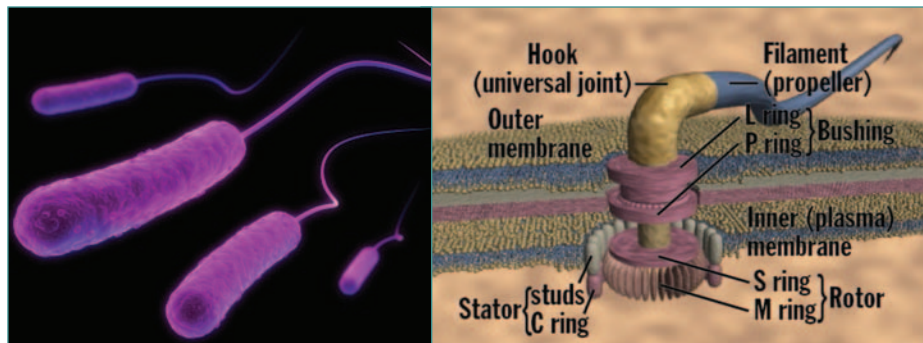
Miniscule motors

ELECTRIC motors are very familiar things. They impinge on every aspect of our lives, providing power and movement in countless ways. In their simplest form they consist of a rotor and drive shaft supported on bearings and surrounded by a stator consisting of coils of wire. When an electric current is applied, the rotor rotates due to the magnetic forces induced in the system.

Think of a motor so small that a million side by side would measure about an inch. This microscopic engine and drive mechanism is composed of forty parts, including a rotor, stator, drive shaft, bearings, universal joint and flexible propeller. It is a motor that can rotate at up to 20,000 rpm (twice as fast as a racing car engine), and can reverse direction in a quarter of a rotation. Impossible you might think!

These astonishingly complex, tiny, and efficient engines actually exist—inside every one of us. They are the rotary motors that drive the ‘bacterial flagellum’, a whip-like propulsion device for bacteria such as the well-known *E. coli* that lives in our digestive system. This little microorganism is propelled so fast by its whirling flagellum that it can move ten times its length in one second—equivalent to a human doing a 100 metre sprint in five seconds!

The diagram shows the complex design of this incredibly small motor that is built into the double membrane that surrounds the bacterium. The sausage-shaped components are special proteins that react to cause the inner ring to rotate within its bearing. The driving force is a flow of protons (positively charged particles) between the inner and outer parts of the cell membrane. All this is mediated by a series of about thirty other biochemical processes, each of which is essential if movement is to occur.



Even more amazing is the fact that this motor can respond to things in its environment, making the bacterium change direction to move towards substances it can use or, conversely, away from harmful ones.

Clearly all these interlocking features had to come into being all at once – which is a grave problem for evolutionists. One of them, Dr Macnab of Yale University, had the honesty to say:

‘One can only marvel at the intricacy in a simple bacterium, of the total motor and sensory system ... and remark that our concept of evolution by selective advantage must surely be an over simplification’.

Another writer put it like this:

‘As biochemists have begun to examine apparently simple structures like cilia and flagella, they have discovered staggering complexity, with dozens or even hundreds of precisely tailored parts. As the number of required parts increases, the difficulty of *gradually* putting the system together skyrockets, and ... Darwin looks more and more forlorn’.

We can truly say with the Psalmist: ‘*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all*’ (Psalm 104.24).

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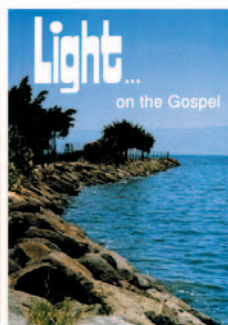
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